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Anti-Halal and Anti-Animal Slaughtering Campaigns and Their Impact in Post-War Sri Lanka

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Abstract: This paper aims to examine the overall impact of anti-*halal* and anti-slaughtering campaigns in the context of post-war Sri Lanka. The reemergence of majoritarian ethno-religious anti-minority nationalist forces and their intensified anti-minority hatred and violence have made it challenging for ethno-religious minorities in Sri Lanka to engage in religious norms and duties. This is especially true for the Muslim community. Numerous Islamic fundamentals have been criticized and opposed. Muslims have had to endure threats and acts of violence. These campaigns and violent oppositions, imposed by the Buddhist-nationalist forces, have caused concern for Muslims performing their obligatory religious duties and norms. In Sri Lanka, the Muslim community has been allowed to produce *halal* food and slaughter animals for human consumption and religious rituals for a long period without disturbance. Unfortunately, retaliation and hatred in the post-civil war era in the country have threatened these rights. Thus, it has become imperative to investigate the motivating factors of the anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering campaigns and violence, as well as their related impact, which is lacking in the existing literature on ethno-religious politics in the context of Sri Lanka. This study found that the anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering campaigns and oppositions that have been intensified by the Buddhist nationalist forces were part of anti-Muslim sentiments intended to sabotage the economic pride of Muslims and undermine their religious renaissance. The study also found that these campaigns have been facilitated by the state and that continuous facilitation of the anti-Muslim sentiments and campaigns, including the anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughter campaigns, would challenge the country's economic prosperity and the rebuilding of ethno-religious harmony.

Keywords: anti-*halal* campaigns; animal slaughtering; Muslims; Buddhist nationalism; post-war Sri Lanka

1. Introduction

As a minority group in Sri Lanka's ethno-religious society, Muslims have a history of peaceful co-existence with other ethnic groups. Among the Muslims, "Moors" form the majority (about 95 percent). Indian Muslims and Malays make up the rest. As one of the ethnic groups in the country, Muslims (mainly referring to "Moors") have been living for centuries as a privileged community with impartial rights and freedoms, including the right and freedom to practice their religion—Islam and its fundamentals. Other than the 1915 anti-Muslim riots, there has never been any serious anti-religious hatred or violence against the Muslims and their Islamic practices in Sri Lanka. There were a few minor incidents in towns where Sinhalese are the majority and in some parts of the eastern province where Muslims are the majority, such as in Deegawapi, in the Amparai District. However, as we explain in the third section of this paper, many government policies and programs

have targeted the economic well-being and flourishing of Muslims as well as other ethnic minorities. Since there has been a serious focus on war against separatist claims by the government authorities since the 1980s, these anti-Muslim issues did not gain international attention. With the end of the 30-year-long civil war in 2009, in the post-civil war era, the Muslim community scattered across the island country became “another other” and have had to face numerous issues and challenges in terms of fostering their ethno-religious identity and performing norms and duties pertaining to their religion. Religious hate campaigns were subsequently extended to Muslims and the community became the key target of ethno-nationalist violence. Most of the issues and challenges Muslims have had to face were imposed by Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces that proclaim to protect, promote, and preserve the Sinhalese race and Buddhism and their dignity in the country. The resurgence of Sinhala-Buddhism with the end of the civil war helped catalyze the emergence of such groups. Their sentiments were based on the beliefs that Sri Lanka is the only country blessed by the Great Buddha for the prosperity of Buddhism and faces risks from Islamic revivalism and fundamentalism. Challenging the ethnic origin and the history of the Muslims, opposing the building of worship and religious teaching places such as mosques and madrasas, destroying such places, opposing the practice of Islamic law (*Sharia*) and financial systems, opposing and criticizing the Islamic clothing such as *abaya*, *niqab*, and *hijab*, opposing *halal* food and *halal* food processing and labelling, and opposing animal slaughtering for human consumption and religious rituals have been the major manifestations of the anti-Muslim sentiments of the nationalist forces [1–9]. These sentiments have been intensified among the majority ethno-religious group in the country—the Sinhala-Buddhist—through violence and campaigns, agitations, and demonstrations that used both print and electronic media. Among these tactics, the anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering campaigns gained traction and have had a severe impact on the religious practice and economic well-being of Muslims.

The major objective of this paper is to analyze the motivations and impact, particularly from an economic perspective, of the anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering campaigns that were intensified by the Buddhist nationalist forces, as part of the general anti-Muslim sentiments, in the post-civil war era in Sri Lanka. Although there are studies on the ethnic, religious, and cultural perspectives of the anti-Muslim sentiments and violence in post-war Sri Lanka, the studies on the economic motives or perspectives of the anti-Muslim campaigns pertaining to the anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering remain limited. This study attempts to fill that void.

2. Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature and mostly used secondary data collected from research articles, books, newspaper articles, Internet materials, and reports collected from libraries, research centers, and websites. These sources have recorded and reported the nature and impact of the anti-Muslim campaigns instigated by the nationalist forces and Sinhala-Buddhists in the post-war era. Through the analysis of existing sources, this study has attempted to examine the nature of the anti-Muslim campaigns, particularly the anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering campaigns by the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces in the post-civil war era and their economic and other impact on the lives of those in the Muslim community. The economic motives of the anti-*halal* and anti-slaughtering campaigns are specifically analyzed through interpretive expressions and arguments.

Following the introduction, this paper discusses the methodology adopted in this study for data collection and analysis. This section is followed by a brief historical review of the status of ‘the Moors’ or Muslims as a minority business community under the threat of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka. The next part extensively analyzes the nature of anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering sentiments and campaigns expressed by the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces in the post-civil war era and their impact and expected impact, particularly on the economic well-being of the Muslim community. A particular concern was given in this section to identifying the economic motives of the anti-*halal* and anti-slaughtering campaigns and how they will affect the Muslim community as well as the country’s larger economic sector in the future. The concluding remarks include suggestions and

recommendations to enhance religious tolerance and ethnic reconciliation in pluralistic societies such as Sri Lanka.

3. Sri Lankan Muslims as a Minority Community under the Threat of Sinhala-Buddhist Nationalism: A Historical Review

The major group among the Sri Lankan Muslims, officially labelled “Moors” in ethnic grouping, form 9.3 percent of the country’s national population [10]. Out of the 1.95 million, two-thirds live outside the northeastern region and coexist with the Sinhalese who form about 74.5 percent of the country’s population. The rest of the Muslims live in the northeastern region where Tamils predominantly reside. While the origin and the history of the Muslims are still debatable, we know they have lived in Sri Lanka since the 8th century [11–15]. Being mostly the descendants of Arab traders, Muslims in Sri Lanka initially settled in port cities around the country and coexisted with the local communities while maintaining strong socio-economic, cultural, and political ties with them [15,16]. The majority of Sri Lankan Muslims have been involved in trading and commercial enterprises. The traditional image of Muslims as traders may be due to the fact that they wanted to maintain the traditions of their forefathers who came from the Arab peninsula. These Muslim traders integrated well into Sri Lankan society and ultimately became critical as trade brokers between rival Sri Lankan kingdoms and even advised kings on foreign affairs ([16], p. 90). The Muslim community, through their hard work, commitments, and long tradition of private entrepreneurship, became established in the field of export and import industries.

It is noteworthy that Muslims and Sinhalese seem to have coexisted relatively harmoniously for several hundred years. However, this harmonious living was not as evident in the case of the colonial authorities, or even with the Tamils, the second majority ethnic group in the country (See: [15,17,18]). Muslims, whom the Kings found to be very energetic and enterprising, were subjected to all types of restrictions during the colonial and post-independence era and particularly in the post-war era. Muslims in Sri Lanka gradually lost their hold on businesses through various laws and reform policies adopted by the successive governments. During the colonial period, the adaptation of many acts and imposition of different forms of taxes on trade and business activities, particularly by the Dutch rulers, compelled the coastal Muslims who were influential in trade and commercial activities in the major coastal towns to move into the interior part of the country [17,19,20]. The riots of 1915 were directed toward the Muslims who were carrying on a competitive trade with the Low-Country Sinhalese in Sri Lanka.

The 1915 anti-Muslim riots were the first notable witness of the Buddhist nationalist campaigns and oppositions toward the economic gains of the Muslim community in the country. The riots of 1915 were directed toward the Muslims, but, more specifically, those in a section of the Muslim community. Called “Coastal Moors”, they were recent immigrants from the Malabar Coast and maintained a competitive trade with the Low-Country Sinhalese in the central region of Sri Lanka. Since the Low-Country Sinhalese traders were an influential group within the Buddhist movement that urged political reform in the country, religious sentiment often gave a sharp ideological focus and a cloak of respectability to sordid commercial rivalry [19]. As Stewart [5] points out, ostensibly, the Sinhalese-Muslims riots of 1915 were explicitly rooted in Buddhist sentimentality. However, De Silva has suggested that the underlying cause of the violence was a desire to eliminate business rivals who just happened to be Muslim. According to him, “the ubiquitous activities of the Coast Moors in retail trading brought them in contact with the people at their most indignant levels—they were reputed to be more willing than their competitors to extend credit, but they also sold at higher prices. This earned them hostility alike of the people at large and of their competitors among the Sinhalese traders (mainly Low Country Sinhalese), who had no compunctions about exploiting religious and racial sentiments to the detriment of their well-established rivals” ([21], pp. 474–75). Similarly, Jayawardena also confirms that economic disparity was a major reason for the 1915 riots. She writes that, with the aggravated economic hardships the poor had to face after the outbreak of the First World War, fierce resentment

developed against profiteering and was directed mainly toward Moor traders. Nonetheless, Sinhala nationalist groups depicted the conflict as a religious and ethnic struggle, where the very existence of the Sinhala-Buddhist civilization was under threat [22]. According to Tambiah [23], the anti-Muslim riots of 1915 looked organized. However, as Sameem points out, due to timely actions of the British government, the Muslims were saved from the 1915 massacre in Sri Lanka. The 1915 riots, however, scarred the Sinhalese-Muslims relationship in Sri Lanka, which the Muslims have never forgotten [19].

In the post-independence era, clashes between Sinhalese and Muslims occurred in different periods and many were motivated by either the Sinhalese opposing Muslims' economic prosperity or their ethno-religious revivalism. The passage of the Citizenship Act of 1948, which disfranchised thousands of Indian Muslims, served a severe blow to the business activities of the Indian Muslims. Due to the colonization and nationalization policies of the post-independence governments, Muslims—particularly those in the eastern province—lost thousands of acres of agricultural lands that reduced the Muslim ownership of agricultural lands (see [24,25]). In particular, measures such as the ceiling on house and property ownership, the takeover of export and import trade, and the expansion of the cooperative system in local trade broke the backbone of the Muslim bourgeoisies [19,26]. In 1976, police shot several Muslims in Puttalam after clashes between Muslims and Sinhalese, which were apparently provoked by disputes over jobs and land. There were sporadic incidents in the 1990s, including attacks on shops in Nochchiyagama in Anuradapura in 1999. In April 2001, Sinhalese mobs attacked Muslims in Mawanella. Two Muslims died and dozens of business centers and vehicles were destroyed. The riots seemed to have been sparked by Muslim complaints over police inaction of an assault on a Muslim store owner by three Sinhalese racketeers. Sometimes, these incidents stemmed from small personal disputes but often involved accusations of underlying nationalist campaigns against the Muslims' businesses. In some cases, the incidents were instigated by extreme Buddhist-nationalist factions linked to local business or mafia groups [27]. The nationalist forces continued targeting Muslim enterprises in the post-civil war era through violence and resistance over the mode of production, *halal* certification processes, and the export and import activities of some products.

The anti-*halal* and anti-slaughter campaigns among Sinhala-Buddhists in post-war Sri Lanka, which have roots in the anti-colonial struggles, combined religion, nationalism, and economic well-being. Buddhism became the core of ethnic Sinhalese nationalism and was involved in identity politics during the anti-colonial movement in Sri Lanka. The post-war anti-Muslim agitprop that feeds off the Islamophobia now trending globally was especially rife under former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, whose majoritarian ethno-religious policies were dictated by the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist ideology. During the Rajapaksa administration (2005–2014), Buddhist supremacy was flaunted in television, movies, and newspapers. Moreover, Buddha statues were purposely erected in Muslim and Tamil areas in the northeastern region [28]. The following sections analyze the expression of the anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering sentiments and campaigns, their impact, and the major factors motivating these types of sentiments, particularly against Muslims in the post-civil war era in Sri Lanka.

4. Post-Civil War Anti-*Halal* and Anti-Animal Slaughtering Sentiments and Campaigns

The post-civil war era has been a challenging period for Muslims in Sri Lanka in terms of fostering their religious identity and ensuring their economic well-being. Muslims became the victims of Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism hatred and violence in a number of ways. Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces, mostly the monks' organizations, movements, and parties, were the major drivers that conceptualized and inflamed the anti-Muslim and anti-minority sentiments. The monks claimed that Buddhism is being threatened by aggressive Muslim preaching and that Islam poses a danger to other religions, culture, race, and economy [7]. Anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering campaigns played vital roles in consolidating anti-Muslim sentiment in general. In addition to using print media, they also leveraged social media such as Facebook and Twitter to spread their messages and rumors

against Muslims, and to mobilize and recruit followers. The Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), Sinhala Ravaya, Ravana Balakaya, Sinha Handa, and Sinhale Jathika Balamuluawa are the major Buddhist nationalist forces that have been expressing and intensifying anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering sentiments and campaigns in the post-civil war years. Some nationalist political parties, such as Jathika Hela Urumaya (National Heritage Party or JHU), Jathika Nidahas Peramuna, and Pivithuru Hela Urumaya, have also supported these anti-Muslim nationalist forces.

4.1. Anti-Halal Sentiments and Oppositions

The retaliation and backlash against *halal* certificates on food items and consuming *halal* foods have been and continue to be viewed as a threat to the religious practice of Muslims in post-war Sri Lanka. Many of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces were very critical of *halal* foods and the *halal* certification process because Buddhists consider *halal* meat preparation to be immoral and unacceptable. They argue that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist nation, and, therefore, association with Islam or *halal* is a great disservice and an insult to the nation [5]. However, one of the major fundamental teachings of Islam is that its followers must adhere to *halal* and *haram* in their daily life. Accordingly, *halal* refers to that which is lawful and permissible, while *haram* refers to that which is prohibited under Islamic (*Sharia*) law. *Halal* is one of five *Ahkam* (provisions)—*fard* (compulsory), *mustahabb* (recommended), *halal* (allowed), *makruh* (disliked), and *haram* (forbidden)—that define the morality of human action in Islam. Muslims are therefore advised to live by *halal* and refrain from *haram*. Since 2000, the All Ceylon Jamiatul Ulama (ACJU), the main theological decision-making body for Sri Lankan Muslims, has been in charge of monitoring and issuing *halal* certificates. The International Certification Organization, called the World Halal Council and based in Indonesia, granted ACJU with the certification authority. ACJU's *halal* certification process was started because of requests from the business sector due to its potential as a marketing tool. From the perspective of businesses, the *halal* certificate is a tool to increase demand for products in local and international markets. Following the requests, the ACJU formed the *Halal* committee to issue the certificates—which was not seen as a serious problem until the BBS started its hate campaign in 2012. After that, the *halal* issue became the center of the BBS campaign, which has led to post-war Muslim concerns and received international attention [4].

Galagoda A. Gnanasara Thero, the leading monk of the BBS, a group of self-proclaimed saviors of the nation, has been accused of increasing anti-Muslim sentiments and campaigns in general, and the anti-*halal* opposition in particular, in the post-war years. The BBS was formed in July 2012 and embraced anti-Muslim and anti-Christian (mainly anti-evangelical) rhetoric from the beginning. The immediate predecessor to the BBS was the JHU, which was formed in February 2004 [28]. The BBS claims that Buddhism is not protected and is threatened in Sri Lanka. They criticize the government and authorities for not protecting the Sinhala nation, race, and Buddhist religion [7]. While justifying their anti-Muslim sentiments and campaigns, Gnanasara Thero augured that “we are not terrorists and it is the sole right of the Sinhala-Buddhists to protect Sri Lanka from all other forces” [29]. These Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces also claim that Muslims are fundamentalists and seek to make Sri Lanka an “Arabian country.” Additionally, Gnanasara Thero questioned the legal authority of the ACJU in issuing the *halal* certificates. According to him, in September 2007, the Act pertaining to *halal* certification was cancelled. From that point on, the issuing of *halal* certification was considered an offence and illegal. The people who obtained the *halal* certification as well as those who were engaged in issuing it were doing so against the law [30]. Similarly, Gnanasara Thero argued that “this is a Sinhala-Buddhist country. We have a Sinhala-Buddhist culture. This is not Saudi Arabia. But you must accept the culture and behave in a manner that doesn't harm it” [31]. The BBS and other extremist Buddhist groups have manipulated and magnified these exaggerations and misconceptions to claim that Islamist fundamentalism is threatening the island [28]. While intensifying their anti-*halal* and animal slaughtering sentiments and campaigns, they have been active in the mobs, throwing stones and destroying Muslim shops and worship and teaching centers.

Historically, Muslims have not faced issues in terms of *halal* food and food processing. However, as Hussain [4] rightly points out, with the widespread use of packaged synthetic foods, identification of *halal* foods suddenly became a real problem because they could contain forbidden ingredients not listed on the packages. On the other hand, this *halal* certification process was also requested by traders exporting food items to foreign countries so they would not be handicapped in certain markets without *halal* certification. Therefore, there was a need for *halal* certification, and the ACJU obliged by meeting these needs. There was nothing secret, nothing criminal, and nothing deleterious to the national interest of Buddhist-Sinhalese or the country in regard to the actions of the ACJU in issuing *halal* certificates. However, the BBS and other Buddhist nationalist groups have openly called for boycotts on *halal* consumer products that are associated with Muslims. Their anti-*halal* sentiments and campaigns turned serious, particularly during 2013 and 2014. According to them, the ACJU makes money from *halal* certification and uses it for nefarious purposes such as to propagate Islam, expand Islamic communities, and build mosques [8].

These nationalist forces, in fact, used electronic media to mobilize the network of Buddhist organizations and groups to boycott *halal*-labelled foods. All these actions have ultimately forced the ACJU to stop issuing *halal* certificates and, on 1 January 2014, transferred that certification function to the Halal Accreditation Council (HAC), a limited guarantee company [32]. The ACJU has also agreed to leave the *halal* certification process in order to make sure Muslims are not responsible for a larger communal crisis in the country. In fact, government authorities failed to take any action to stop or control the emerging anti-*halal* sentiments and oppositions. Sinhalese-Muslims relations have been wrecked as a result. So far, all the anti-*halal* campaigns waged by the BBS and other nationalist forces have done is threaten manufacturers to make them remove the *halal* certification emblem from their packaging. In the future, they may try to use the media to persuade the Sinhala-Buddhists to refrain from purchasing *halal* products. This is the easy way for them to sabotage the trade and business industries operated by the Muslim community.

4.2. Oppositions to Animal Slaughtering

The Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces, such as the BBS and Sinha Handa, and the political forces, such as the JHU, have been very critical of animal slaughtering for human consumption, especially cows, and of religious rituals—particularly those performed by Muslims. They attack Islam on the basis that it is a religion that mistreats cows. Islam specifies principles for its followers to slaughter animals for food and other ritualistic purposes. The intention of the Islamic law (*Sharia*) is to ensure a more humane slaughtering process that reduces the suffering of the animal. The idea behind *Sharia* is to stop cruelty toward animals; so, in a sense, this is common ground for decent people, both believers and non-believers of Islam [1]. Scientists have also found the Quranic process of slaughtering to be the healthiest way. However, in the post-civil war era, it has not only been this Quranic process of slaughtering that has been questioned and opposed by Buddhist nationalist forces, but also the slaughtering of cattle for meals and other purposes, such as rituals. These forces have argued that slaughtering is inhumane and an affront to Buddhist values and the majority's sensibilities.

The resistance against animal slaughtering has caused various difficulties for the Muslim community when it comes to performing their religious rituals. This is especially true during the annual *Haj* festival celebration where Muslims perform *udhuyya* or *Qurbani* by slaughtering cattle. Besides being a religious duty for Muslims, the celebration also strengthens social solidarity because meat is distributed to relatives, friends, and the poor. In other words, the festival becomes an occasion for affirming social solidarity and compassion for the poor. There is nothing in these practices that warrants the Buddhists' moral objection to cattle slaughtering to perform *udhuyya* [4]. However, due to the anti-animal slaughtering campaigns of these nationalist forces, during the *Haj* festival in 2012, some local government offices reportedly refused to issue permits to animal slaughterers. In September 2012, the Kandy Municipal Council passed a resolution banning animal slaughtering within the municipal council limits [33]. This caused Muslims more financial and other burdens in slaughtering cattle for

rituals and business purposes. This anti-animal slaughtering issue has been ongoing in many parts of the country. The campaigns are mainly to oppose the Muslims' religious practices, but there are other motives as well, particularly economic.

On 24 May 2013, a Buddhist monk known as Bowatte Indaratana Thera succumbed to his injuries and died after setting himself on fire in front of the Kandy Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth), which is considered to be one of the major holy temples of Buddhism [34]. Indaratana Thera was a strident advocate of *halal* abolitionism. He believed in it so strongly that he was willing to commit suicide to draw attention to the cause. He has since become a cult-like hero among the *halal* abolitionist movement [5]. This incident intensified the anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughter sentiments and protests of the BBS and other extreme nationalist forces and caused a tense situation during the following months in many parts of the country. More importantly, with continued pressure from the BBS and other Buddhist nationalist forces, in January 2016 the country's president ordered government authorities to find possible ways to import meat from foreign countries to cater to the local requirement and ban the slaughtering of cattle [35]. This has created suspicions among Muslims who consider it a strategic step to sabotage their economic activities as well as their religious practices. Animal slaughtering, especially the slaughtering of cows, remains a very sensitive issue among certain sects of the Sinhala-Buddhist community, which they use to sow hatred and exacerbate division between the communities.

5. Discussion

As a minority ethnic group, Muslims have been living in Sri Lanka for centuries coexisting with the major ethnic groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Muslims were granted freedom and privileges in order to perform their ethno-religious norms and duties and their traditional livelihood activities such as trade and business. Historically, the ethnic identity of Sri Lankan Muslims (Moors) was formed and developed through their religious-cultural attachment and practice. As a result, Muslims have been especially cautious in practicing their ethnicity features and religious guidelines in all aspects of their daily activities, so as to promote their ethnicity and identity. However, the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces in the pre-and- post-independence era, particularly in the post-civil war era, have aggressively targeted the ethnic and religious features and the religious practices of Muslims in public life. Respecting the religious-cultural distinctiveness of all groups and freely allowing them to practice their religion are the pre-conditions to establishing ethnic cohesion in any plural society. In fact, all religions teach the importance of respecting the faith and principles of other religious groups, including those of minorities. Muslims in Sri Lanka have also been practicing their religious and cultural beliefs and norms without harming others. Until the emergence of the extreme nationalist forces among the majority Sinhala-Buddhist, there was no serious opposition in the country regarding the practice of Islamic fundamentals, *halal* foods, animal slaughtering, and other Muslim religious affairs.

However, the post-civil war anti-Muslim sentiments and violence were not a sudden emergence among the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists. The root of these sentiments emerged during the colonial period. The Muslims' dominance in trade and business and their economic prosperity in the country caused the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists to question the origin and modes of livelihoods of Muslims. There were numerous writers, dramatists, journalists, and monks who wrote extensively, glorifying the heroic deeds of the Sri Lankan Kings, recalling the victories against foreign invasions and also denouncing foreign traders and urging Sinhala people to boycott the shops of Muslim traders. In particular, the writings of Anagarika Dharmapala during this period mainly targeted the economic gains of Muslims. Dharmapala also propagated that Buddhist civilization was in danger. Therefore, his writings motivated the Sinhala-Buddhists to develop strong anti-Muslim sentiments and campaigns in the following years. This ended with the historic anti-Muslim riots in 1915 that destroyed millions in trade and the business properties of a section of Muslims in Sri Lanka, as explained in Section 3 of this paper (see also [5,22,36]).

In the post-war era, particularly since 2010, there have been further examples of such intense anti-Muslim campaigns and violence. In most recent cases of anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering campaigns, the motivation appears to be more explicitly religious in character, but economic motives have also influenced these campaigns. The series of mob violence and attacks imposed by these nationalist forces, particularly those targeting the *halal* foods and animal slaughtering, together with the attacks on Muslims' economic enterprises such as textiles and shopping centers, have purposes other than religion, and they are often politically organized or induced. In addition, the Sri Lankan constitution has guaranteed the religious rights of all religious groups and the freedom to practice those rights without the intervention of others. The constitution has ensured the role of the state to protect and promote the religious groups. However, in the ethnic conflict and the civil war and post-civil war contexts, minorities' opportunities to practice their religious freedom have been challenged, partly due to the state's failure to establish a cohesive and conducive socio-political environment to protect and promote inter-religious harmony and tolerance. The continuous campaigns against the religious rights and practices of minorities also indicate the incapacity of the political and security structures of Sri Lanka to accommodate ethnic and religious diversity within the larger political sphere.

The anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering campaigns and mobilizations, together with chauvinistic public discourse, have caused a few critical journalists, public intellectuals, and activists to rightly draw parallels between these developments and the events that led up to the July 1983 pogrom against the Tamil community in the country. The new liberal policies came with the global economic downturn in the 1970s and the related failure of the economic program of the then United Front government. Gunasinghe [37] has also observed that the political patronage structure that marked the economy of the country from 1955 to 1977 was dismantled in 1977; the open economic policy produced new and unforeseen tensions among some sections of the Sinhalese entrepreneurs who were expecting to obtain special concession as a mark of political patronage. This major economic transformation, which benefited some and impoverished others, was also the economic ground on which Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism was fanned. In other words, these economic developments underscored the rising tension between the Sinhalese and the Tamil communities during the post-1977 era. The initial spurt of economic growth after the reforms receded after a few years and inflation and cost of living increased. These were also times when increasing competition among traders led to the perceptions of Tamil businesses gaining from the economic reforms. In fact, in the post-1977 era, the private sector replaced the public sector as the engine of growth. In this context, the non-Sinhalese jobseekers, particularly those fluent in English, no longer faced the disadvantages of the previous public sector driven job market. Thus, an impression was created that minorities were securing private sector jobs, while Sinhalese youth remained unemployed ([38], pp. 38–39). Such economic woes and perceptions coupled with the active mobilization of government politicians led to the bouts of violence that culminated in the pogrom of July 1983 [39].

The economic parallels that could be drawn between the 1983 ethnic riots and the post-war anti-Muslim campaigns and violence are striking. Despite impressive growth statistics, a closer consideration of growth realities in the post-war years suggested an absence of inclusive and sustainable growth ([37], p. 113). As Kadirgamar [39] points out, the final years of civil war saw the mobilization of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. However, the end of civil war did not lead to a change in the nationalist mindset through a political settlement; rather, a triumphalist government projected economic development as the solution to the country's problems. The political consolidation of the Rajapaksa regime and the stability it brought to the country after the war, coupled with the global economic crisis of 2008 that led to global finance capital moving toward the emerging markets, saw an initial burst of inflow of capital and economic growth in Sri Lanka. This provided the ground for the second wave of neoliberalism in Sri Lanka. Such neoliberal policies are leading to the expansion of the market and financialization of the economy, but also rising inequalities and indebtedness. While consumer items are plentiful and there have been increasing avenues for consumption through debt in the form of bank loans, financing, leasing, and pawning, it has led to increasing debt and dispossession

when loans are not repaid. Such a dynamic combined with the rising cost of living was leading to social unrest. Given the role of sections of the Muslim community in trading and retail business, the Muslims became the latest scapegoat for Sinhala chauvinists. In other words, Kadirgamar [39] argues that economic changes and economic disaffection combined with the war-time and post-war mobilization of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism were shaping the anti-Muslim campaign, particularly the anti-*halal* project. Because there had been changes to the economy, including the expansion of the market and the related broadening of the class of shop owners, three-wheeler drivers, and migrant workers, together with the renaissance in terms of culture and religion, these changes were central to the target of the attacks within the Muslim community.

In fact, the anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering campaigns were promoted by the Rajapaksa regime as part of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism as a means of generating the support of the majority community (Sinhalese) for military defeat of separatist claims of the Tamil minority and to consolidate a strong Sinhala-Buddhist state. This nationalism reemerged based on the hegemonic ideological foundation that it can provide social cohesion and secure identity together with promises of social and economic mobility like the way Hindutva gained momentum in India. This nationalism also tried to alienate the ethnic minorities in the country. In the process, Muslims also became a target because the religious revivalism and the political autonomy demands that emerged had also challenged the objectives of post-war Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka. The war against the separatist claim was motivated through the ideological campaigns of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, which were targeted to win the war on one hand and to marginalize or undermine the uprising of ethno-religious minorities on the other hand. Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, while promoting a military solution to the national question, aimed to strengthen the unitary nature of the state structure in which there was little room for power devolution or autonomy for minorities. This was one of the major reasons expressed by nationalist forces for the oppositions whenever Muslims advocated for power-sharing and political autonomy during the peace process (see [9,40]). Some nationalist political forces found the Muslims' autonomy demand to be equal to the Tamils' demand for a separate state. Ironically, almost all of the Muslim political parties and leaders also supported the war and the initiatives to consolidate state power. Directly or indirectly, Muslim political parties have contributed to the protection of the unitary state, which derives its ideological power from Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. This proves that Muslim political leaders have also reasoned for the anti-Muslim campaigns in the post-civil war era. It is true that although some Muslim leaders opposed what Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces did to Muslims in the post-war era, almost all Muslim leaders were with the Rajapaksa regime and strongly supported passing acts and constitutional amendments, making policy decisions favoring institutionalizing Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony in the country, and questioning the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, particularly of Muslims, in the post-civil war era.

It is worth noting that inaction and apathy on the part of government to affectively address or control the anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering campaigns—and anti-Muslim sentiments in general—which were intensified by the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces, suggested that these campaigns were conducted with the tacit approval of the government. For instance, in March 2013, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, the then Secretary of Defense and the brother of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, signaled his support of the BBS by attending the opening of its Buddhist Leadership Academy [38]. He also intoned that it is the monks who protect country, Buddhist religion, and the Sinhalese race [41]. The rulers and the nationalist forces must understand facilitating the continuation of the anti-Muslim campaigns that target their economic well-being, including the *halal* foods industries, will lay the foundation for the emergence of a conflict that will once again tear the country apart. It will also challenge the post-war ethnic integration process. National and ethnic integration means recognizing the ethnic and religious diversity of communities in a country and that each one has the right to live where they want and do what they want, including practicing their religion without harming others.

There are worries among the liberal Sinhala-Buddhists that, for many years, instead of practicing what Buddha preached such as *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Karuna* (compassion), *Metta* (affection), and

Maithriya (loving-kindness toward fellow humans), the Buddhist clergy in Sri Lanka instead engaged in un-Buddhist practices such as racist politics, even promoting Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism and hatred toward minorities. As Steward [5] rightly points out, as far as *halal* abolitionism is concerned, it is imperative to understand that the movement is not simply a peaceful animal welfare movement. The underlying motives are actually ethnic, religious, and material well-being. In this instance, anti-*halal* and animal welfarism is just a vehicle for attacking Muslims' religious practices and businesses. It is part of a wider anti-Muslim movement that appeals to general Buddhist principles, which, on the surface, seem reasonable, but in reality is used as a device to target and marginalize Muslim communities from the trade and business sectors in the country.

The anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering campaigns, intensified by the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces, are also ideologically problematic. These forces claim that they do not oppose the Islamic practices of traditional Muslims but rather Islamic fundamentalists arguing that Buddhists have lived in harmony with traditional Muslims for centuries. While this distinction is itself problematic, it is also a deceptive maneuver. Their oppositions to *halal* foods and animal slaughtering for meals and religious rituals are far from a mark of fundamentalism. These rituals are part of the basic doctrines of Islam that must be adhered to by any Muslim.

The nationalist forces which intensify the anti-*halal* sentiments and anti-Muslim hatred, however, must understand that these sentiments and oppositions will also affect trade and commercial activities and the economic and diplomatic relations of Sri Lanka with the Muslim world, particularly the Islamic countries in the Middle East. Most of the Islamic countries in the Middle East are not only the major markets of Sri Lankan products such as tea, spices, garments, and coconut-related items, including many *halal*-labelled products, they also help improve the country's socio-economic status through foreign aid, long-term loans, and, most importantly, through offering job opportunities for hundreds of thousands of skilled and unskilled labors. Throughout the civil war and the post-civil war era, these countries have supported Sri Lanka's recovery process and helped to gain international support for the government's initiatives. If many of these Muslim countries end their relations with Sri Lanka, all these economic benefits would be in question. It is worth noting that many Islamic or Arab countries have individually or collectively warned the Sri Lankan government to stop post-war anti-Muslim campaigns and violence. There is no guarantee that these countries would continue to help Sri Lanka when their ancestors become the continuous target of ethnic and religious hatred and violence.

The labelling of *halal* on food items is also equally important for non-Muslims, particularly for Sinhalese who have been exporting their products to the Muslim countries that need *halal* certification for their consumers. In fact, equally or even more so than Muslims, Sinhalese traders have been exporting their products to many Arab countries. The ceasing of *halal* labelling would definitely limit their business activities in these countries and affect the economic sector of the country as well.

As twinned with the history of anti-Muslim campaigns and oppositions among the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces, there is an economic motive behind the anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering campaigns, particularly in the post-war era. As a result of their hard work and commitment, Muslims have been highly influential for the last few decades in industries such as textiles, gems, and animal husbandry, as well as in the import and export of wholesale commodities. The beef supply, for example, is entirely conducted by Muslim traders throughout the country since slaughtering cows is prohibited in Buddhism. As a business and trading community, Muslims have been, to a certain extent, influential in the commercial activities of the major towns and cities in Sri Lanka. However, Muslims have always been of great value to the Sinhalese and seen as trustworthy traders. As a result, Sinhalese have been conducting their business activities with Muslims traders through partnership and exchange of raw materials and products. This partnership has tightened their ethnic and socio-economic relationship as well. This economic and societal influence and the ties of Muslims with the Sinhalese may also have caused the nationalist forces to intensify anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering sentiments and campaigns in the post-war era. However, it is worth

noting that when any force attempts to break or undermine this societal set-up, it will affect the socio-economic conditions of not only the Muslims but also the majority Sinhalese.

It is also worth noting that, for pragmatic and strategic reasons, the Sinhalese and government leaders must understand that the anti-Muslim surge is profoundly counterproductive and almost suicidal. It will only lead to further isolation of the country and the majority Sinhalese. The minorities, deemed Trojan horses by Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist forces, are in fact the bridges between the Sinhalese and the outside world, given that there is no other concentration of Sinhalese elsewhere [3]. Therefore, the government authorities and the motivating forces behind the anti-Muslim and anti-minority sentiments, campaigns, and violence must think about the future of the country and build ethnic harmony and religious tolerance. Both are needed in the post-war ethnic reconciliation and economic development processes in Sri Lanka.

In spite of all that has happened, Muslims have also contributed in various ways to the Sinhalese rulers during and in the aftermath of civil war. They have continued to be trustworthy traders and business partners to the Sinhalese public and their rulers as well as good neighbors and citizens who are loyal to the state. Although Muslims have faced challenges in terms of practicing their ethno-religious and cultural duties and norms and doing their livelihood activities independently, due to the nationalism sentiment and government policies and programs, they have never resorted to violence or sought outside forces to rescue them and provide safety and security. Instead, they have used nonviolent means such as dialogues and discussions to appeal to the rulers to find solutions based on the teachings of Islam. In addition, until the formation of a Muslim political party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) in 1986, in the wake of intense ethnic conflict and civil war, Muslims also avoided setting up their own ethnic party and worked instead through the major parties of other ethnic groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Muslim leaders have not been confrontational and remain largely conciliatory. During the civil war, Muslim politicians lobbied Muslim countries in the Middle East to support Sri Lanka at international forums. Almost all Muslim political parties were with the government side headed by the Rajapaksa, portraying loyalty to the country (see [28,37]). These actions illustrate the commitment of Sri Lankan Muslims and their leaders to promote ethnic relations, ethnic harmony, and national and territorial integration of the country. However, as Imtiyas and Saleem [6] rightly point out, the anti-Muslim campaigns and violence that the BBS unleashed consequently surprised and terrified Muslims, even as it made them feel used and abused. This clearly justifies the argument that all of these anti-Muslim sentiments and campaigns, including the anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering campaigns, were part of the post-war project to deprive Muslims economically and undermine their religious uprising. Therefore, these anti-Muslim campaigns and the violence that has accompanied the sentiments are hardly justifiable and indicate the incapacity of the society and state to accept and tolerate religious diversity.

The change of political regime after the presidential election in early 2015 has put a temporary end to the Buddhist nationalist agenda of anti-Muslim hatred and violence. Under the new regime of President Maithripala Sirisena, these nationalist forces have less opportunity to intensify their anti-Muslim campaigns and violence as they did under the Rajapaksa regime. However, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists have consistently manipulated Buddhism and promoted anti-minority sentiment when seeking to mobilize masses. In mid-June 2016, some groups renewed their hate campaigns against Muslims. The BBS threatened to start riots against Muslims similar to the one they staged in 2014 in the areas of Aluthgama and Beruwela. There is a deep grievance among Muslims that the government authorities have failed to take meaningful actions to stop or control the reemergence of these anti-minority, anti-Muslim nationalist forces seeking to strengthen ethnic and social harmony in the country. As DeVotta [28] rightly points out, given the economic challenges and various crosscutting cleavages facing the island, there will be ample opportunity for the Buddhist nationalist force to continue to propagate anti-*halal* or, in general, anti-Muslim sentiments and violence in different forms and on different levels.

6. Conclusions

This paper suggests that the reemergence of ethno-religious nationalism among the majority Sinhala-Buddhists in the post-civil war era has seriously affected the socio-economic well-being of ethno-religious minorities—particularly the Muslim community in Sri Lanka—and their ability to practice religious norms and duties. As a religiously bounded ethnic minority, Muslims have been living in Sri Lanka for centuries as a privileged community while maintaining cordial relationship with ethnic majorities—the Sinhalese and Tamils. As the descendants of Arab traders, the majority of the Muslims in Sri Lanka have also been involved in trade and commercial activities that have made them influential in the economic activities of the major towns and cities in the country. With the exception of a few cases such as the anti-Muslim riots of 1915, they have not faced any serious challenges in conducting business and performing their religious rituals and norms. After the 1915 riots, latent oppositions and violence were hardly motivated by opposing the religious and economic uprising of Muslims in Sri Lanka. However, with the end of the 30-year civil war, which was also motivated by the majoritarian ethno-religious nationalism, Muslims once again became targets of Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalist forces claiming to protect the Sinhalese and Buddhism in Sri Lanka from the threats of Islam and Islamic revivalism. Sentiments and violence were motivated by these forces opposing basic Islamic principles practiced by the Muslims. Intensified anti-*halal* and anti-animal slaughtering sentiments and campaigns were among the major issues, which received national and international attention, influenced the campaigns against the practicing of Islamic principles, and affected the economic well-being of Muslims in the country. These forces have taken umbrage that non-Muslims have also been subjected to this *halal* food practice and have taken up cudgels to protect Sri Lankans from the practice of *halal*, which when translated just means “permissible”—nothing more, nothing less. In the post-war era, Buddhism in Sri Lanka can be characterized as being violent per se. In fact, both the rulers and nationalist forces have used religion as a hegemonic means to extend their dominance in society and maintain power. The post-war Buddhist-nationalism is multi-facial and the anti-Muslim sentiments and campaigns have numerous motivations, including the religious motive to consolidate a strong Sinhala-Buddhist nation state, undermine the economic uprising of Muslims, and marginalize them from the economic and industrial sectors in Sri Lanka.

Nonetheless, whatever the challenges faced by Muslims as a result of the intensified anti-*halal* and animal slaughtering sentiments and campaigns, the Muslim community has not aggravated this issue because doing so would undermine the preserved dignity of the community as a peace-loving and trustworthy Sri Lankan society and escalate communal tensions in the country. As a minority ethnic group living on the margin of ethnic accommodation in the socio-economic and political culture, Muslims must try to cope up with these issues strategically and peacefully while ensuring the continued existence of their community and practicing ethno-religious norms and duties without harming others. Islam teaches Muslims how to resolve conflicts and crisis within and between communities. It also clearly teaches its followers how to deal with matters of *halal* and *haram* and the Islamic ways of slaughtering animals for human consumption and rituals. It is therefore the religious duty of Muslims to know and practice *halal* and *haram* and to avoid consuming any suspicious food item rather than complain about its non-*halal* label. Good Muslims will always adhere to their practice of eating *halal*.

On the other hand, practicing *halal* and *haram* is compulsory only for Islamic followers—Muslims and the *halal* method of animal slaughtering may be a much healthier method for all humans, but Islam never forces any of its principles on non-Muslim followers. Islam also teaches religious tolerance and respect for the culture and norms of others. Muslims making an issue of the anti-*halal* and animal slaughtering sentiments may harm the cordial relationship that has been maintained for centuries between Muslims and Sinhalese in the country. Doing so would also undermine the socio-economic conditions of Muslims to a greater extent. Although Muslims have suffered, they show their interest in resolving conflicts and prejudices over the *halal* matter by agreeing to cease the labelling of *halal* certificates in products, which is considered permissible to Muslims. In doing so, they also avoid a larger ethno-religious crisis in the country. However, the zeal of certain Buddhist clergy clearly drives

the divisive and dangerous efforts of Buddhist-nationalist forces to create friction among religious groups in Sri Lanka.

This is the time to put words into action instead of just talking about reconciling ethnic and religious differences. Respecting the plurality and religious sentiments of all groups is an important condition for building social and ethnic harmony in any plural society. As the guardian of the public, the government needs to uphold its commitment to safeguard civil and political rights and the freedom of all, including the freedom of life and security of person, religious freedom, freedom from religious hatred, and freedom from discrimination. Through state institutions, government must ensure proper implementation of the constitution and domestic laws that relate to minority rights and religious freedom. Government authorities must ensure that religious communities have the freedom to establish religious institutions, including institutions for ethno-religious minorities, and ensure that these institutions are able to function per the law of the country. Early preventive measures to stem violence against religious communities, including providing protection when necessary and not permitting rallies that may incite violence, are also needed.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

ACJU	All Ceylon Jamiatul Ulama
BBS	Bodu Bala Sena
HAC	Halal Accreditation Council
JHU	Jathika Hela Urumaya
SLMC	Sri Lanka Muslim Congress

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